

New York Women's Foundation[®]

Queens Borough Brief

October 2013

Women helping women FUNDING CHANGE



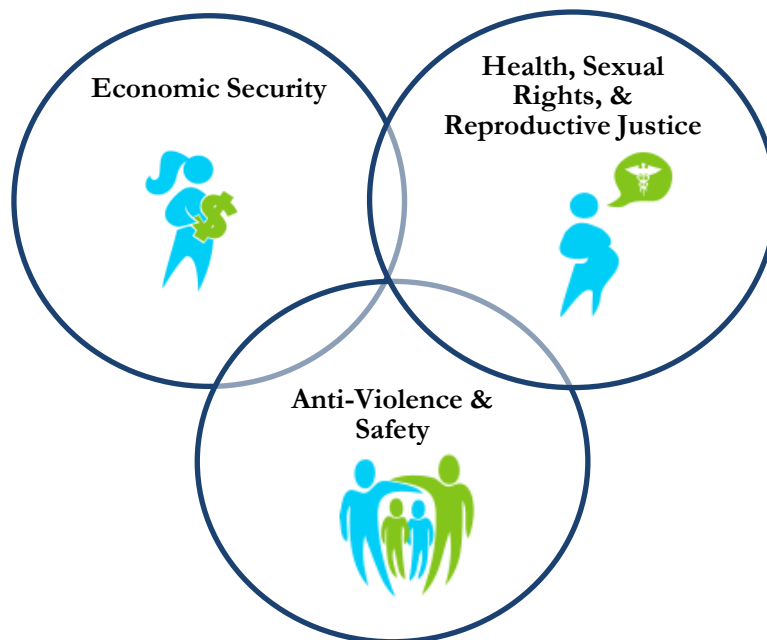
Prepared by the New York Women's Foundation[®]

Introduction

This report describes The New York Women's Foundation's investment in grantee partners in the borough of Queens. The Foundation has a strong history and a deep commitment to serving residents of Queens. Several neighborhoods in Queens face significant difficulties; however, NYWF grantee partners are helping women and girls every day to achieve their goals and improve their life circumstances. NYWF grantee partners in Queens have a range of organizational structures and capacities. Some are community-based organizations that promote opportunities and ameliorate challenges in the lives of local neighborhood residents, while others have a broader reach. Grantee partners offer a truly diverse range of services: assisting women to get their certifications as Home Health Aides and matching them with elders who need care, providing previously incarcerated women with job training and placement, and promoting human rights and social justice in the Nepali community. **Across this continuum, The New York Women's Foundation funds innovators whose work helps to transform individual lives as well as communities, and promotes the vision of a more safe, just, and equitable society.**

The New York Women's Foundation® was formed in 1987 and made its first grants to community-based organizations in 1988. Since then, The Foundation has steadily increased its involvement in communities throughout New York City. In 2012, NYWF® awarded \$5.25 million to 80 grantee partners across the five boroughs.

The Foundation makes its core grants in three major categories:



- **Economic Security:** Grantee partners support women in improving their economic situations through activities including business development assistance/microlending, on-site job training, and connections to placement. Strategies are tailored to the interests and unique strengths of prospective participants. Programs serving girls focus on academic achievement and also address personal/social issues, such as self-esteem.
- **Anti-Violence and Safety:** Grantee partners combat components of violence against women, from domestic violence to sexual assault to street harassment. The wide variety of strategies includes community organizing and using technology to create a safe environment for women and girls to live and work in.

- **Health, Sexual Rights and Reproductive Justice:** Grantee partners address comprehensive health issues affecting a range of groups. Groups engaged in support resources and health training opportunities include vulnerable women, girls, and individuals from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender non-conforming communities. Grantee partners also provide training and education opportunities for providers of complementary services. Many efforts seek to improve the availability of culturally-aware services.

Report Purpose

This brief provides demographic and descriptive data of Queens, an overview of NYWF's investments, and highlights of the work of grantee partners based in the borough. The profile includes participant success stories from the field as well as a discussion of ongoing challenges. Information included in this report was generated from semi-annual reports provided by grantee partners.

For more information about this report, please contact The New York Women's Foundation Director of Evaluation and Strategic Learning, Dr. Erin McDonald at emcdonald@nywf.org or (646)-564-5968.

Highlight of Queens Residents

- New York City's second most populous borough, with **2.2 million residents**.
- Queens is the most ethnically diverse urban area in the world, with a population of over 2.2 million, 48% of whom are foreign-born, representing over 100 different nations and speaking over 138 different languages.^{1,2,3,4}
- Queens hosts neighborhoods where immigrants have been settling for decades (Astoria has historically attracted Greek immigrants), along with newly emerging communities (Corona for Ecuadorians and Richmond Hill for Guyanese immigrants).
- The borough has the highest Asian population in New York City, over 389,000, more than twice any other borough. This includes significant numbers of Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Indian residents.
- 67% of children in Queens were born into poverty and 21% of children persist and are living in poverty.⁵
- While ranking 4th lowest among the five New York City boroughs, 15.4% of all Queens residents were living in poverty, **an increase of 3.2%** from 2008. Poverty is greater among some race/ethnic groups as 20.7% Latinos, 17.6% Asians, 11.9% blacks, and 10.2% whites were living in poverty.⁶
- 12.5% of residents live in overcrowded rental situations, which is the 2nd highest of any borough and greater than the overall City rate of 10.9%.⁷
- 54.2% of all schools are overcrowded, the highest rate of all New York City boroughs and greater than the overall City rate of 37.6%.⁸
- 17,497 children are involved in child abuse and neglect investigations.⁹

When looking at the borough as a whole, the economic strengths of several communities mask real pockets of need. The New York Women's Foundation's Economic Security and Well-Being Index for Women in New York City, published in March 2013, reports the overall poverty rate for women and children in Queens is 12.9% compared with 19.5% Citywide. Queens has a diversified economy, including jobs in the services, trade, manufacturing, and construction sectors. Many employment opportunities are associated with

JFK and LaGuardia airports. The borough hosts several thriving middle class neighborhoods that are predominantly Black – including African Americans and Jamaican and West Indian immigrants. Some areas adjacent to Nassau County on Long Island feel almost suburban, with large, freestanding homes.

Concurrently, neighborhoods like Jamaica and Far Rockaway continue to struggle with poverty, failing schools, and violent crime. Along with this, specific groups are faring worse in Queens than in other areas of New York City. Figure 1 demonstrates highlighted differences in the experience of women in Queens relative to New York City overall. Findings demonstrate that 13.9% of Asian women living in Queens live in poverty compared to Asian women across New York City. Latina women living in Queens also experience poverty at a higher rate compared to Latina women across the City.

Figure 1. Key Differences of Women Living in Queens vs. New York City⁴⁰

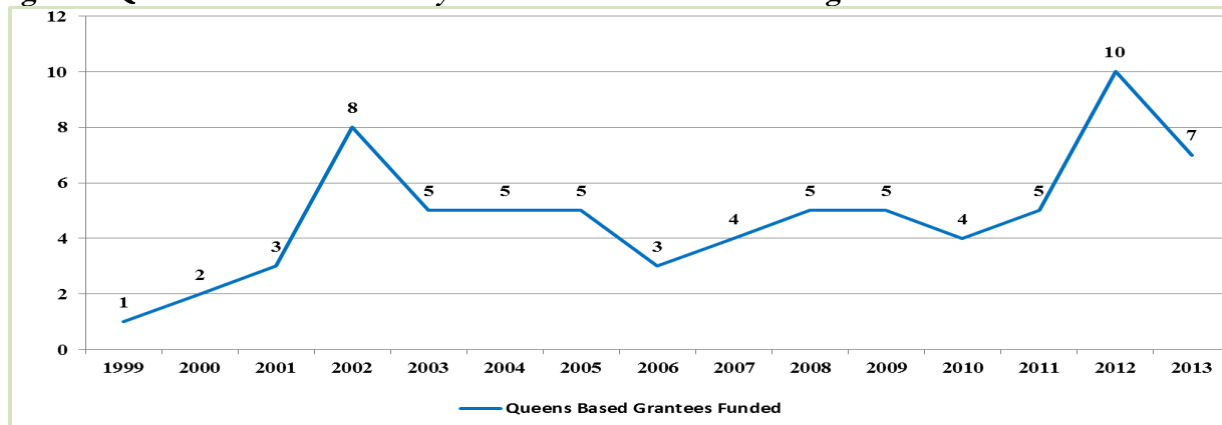
Indicator	Queens	New York City	Difference for Queens
Poverty among Women / Children	12.9%	19.5%	↓6.6%
Poverty among Asian Women	25.1%	11.2%	↑13.9%
Poverty among Hispanic / Latina Women	34.4%	28.7%	↑5.7%
High School Diploma / GED or Less	57%	47%	↑10%

New York Women's Foundation Investment in Queens

The New York Women's Foundation funds programs that address economic security, health, reproductive rights, and safety from violence for women and families. The Foundation's investment centers on the philosophy that improving economic conditions for women across their lifespan as social agents, through a range of strategies, improves women's lives, security of families, and stability of communities. Further, The Foundation is rooted in the understanding that innovative and sustainable solutions must be defined and actualized locally. Not surprisingly, *because there are so many different immigrant groups in Queens, several grantee partners focus on specific ethnic communities, providing locally defined and culturally-aware resources that attract people to the programs and retain their involvement to reach desired goals.*

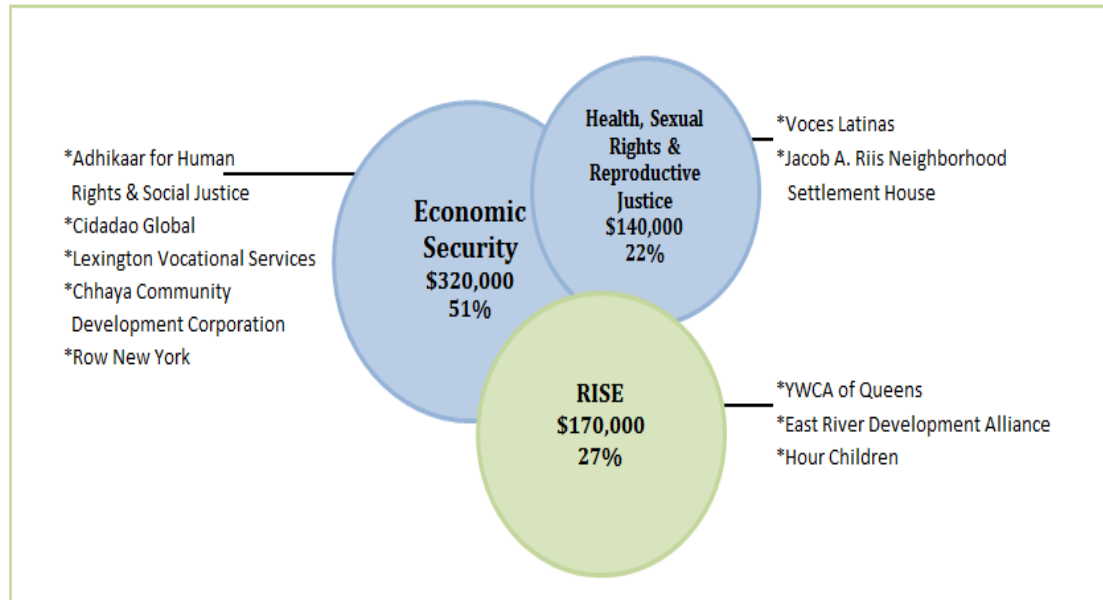
NYWF has made significant investments in grantee partners physically located in Queens and grantee partners that support women and girls from Queens. **Since the Foundation began making grants in 1988, through 2012, a total of 25 Queens-based organizations have received funding.**

Figure 2. Queens-Based Grantees by Total Years of NYWF Funding



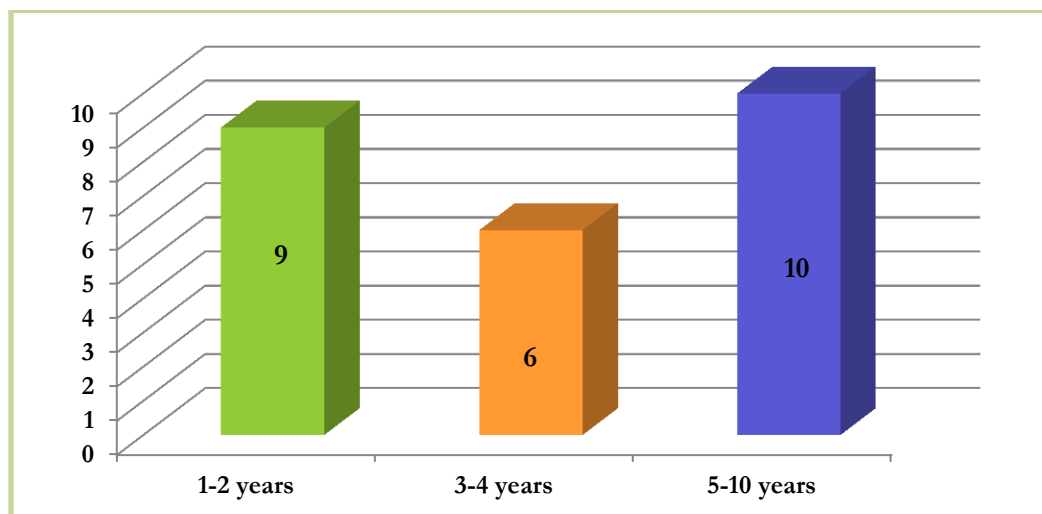
Ten grantee partners awarded funding in 2012 were based in Queens. This includes eight organizations in the economic security focus area, and two that address health needs. In 2012, NYWF made grants of \$690,000 to Queens-based organizations. Additionally, twenty-four other grantee partners served women and girls from Queens.

Figure 3. Primary Focus Areas of Queens Grantee Partner 2012



The New York Women’s Foundation funds many grantee partners for multiple years. The Foundation identifies organizations that are demonstrated innovators in the early stage of development. These grantee partners benefit from NYWF’s sustained commitment to strengthening both their infrastructure and service delivery models. Some organizations receive additional grants over time as they develop new, promising approaches. The chart below demonstrates the length of investment The Foundation has provided to a total of 25 Queens-based organizations from 1999 through 2012.

Figure 4. Queens-Based Grantees by Total Years of NYWF Funding to Date (1988-2012)



Highlighted Queens-Based Grantee Partner Accomplishments

The New York Women's Foundation funds grantee partners that develop innovative and rigorous approaches to effectively address the needs of women and girls. **All grantee partners share NYWF's mission** to achieve sustained economic security and justice for women and girls. The Foundation and grantee partners work collaboratively to create an equitable and just future for women, families, and communities in New York City. The community-based organizations that compose the grantee partners support residents in marginalized neighborhoods to build on strengths and overcome challenges.

In 2012, a total of 2,208 women and girls in Queens were served through NYWF funding. This represents 14% of all individuals served in 2012.

Grantee partners make intensive investments in the women and girls in their programs, offering integrated services to ensure that participants get the support they need to achieve their goals and move on successfully. **NYWF seeks out and funds organizations that can offer life-transforming experiences to the women and girls they serve.**

Hour Children, established in 1995, engages and supports incarcerated and formerly incarcerated mothers. The Hour Working Women Program assists women recently released from prison in beginning educational programs, learning job readiness skills, and conducting job searches. Hour Children pays the first six weeks of salary of a woman placed at an employer partner. NYWF has a long history of funding Hour Children, providing five grants in the years 1999 through 2005, and then consecutive annual grants starting in 2009.

"Our hope is that 100% of our women obtain and retain jobs that enable them to provide for their families and avoid subsequent involvement with the criminal justice system. We also hope our efforts result in greater stability within their families, creating the security their own children need to remain in school and avoid their own involvement with the criminal justice system." (Grantee Quote)

2012 Successes....

- 44 previously incarcerated women have participated in job training services.
- Eight previously unemployed women found employment.
- 93% of participants completed financial literacy training.
- 22 women received legal support (through an attorney or counselors).

Participant Story.....

Released from prison after serving 10 years, L. reached out to Hour Children for help finding a job, one of the stipulations of her parole. It was determined that L. needed a breadth of skills and training to enable her to acquire and retain a livable wage job.

Committed to bettering herself, she was never late, and her performance in the training program was excellent. She attended and actively participated in all workshops and gained skills including Microsoft Office proficiency.

L. assumed the role of a Lobby Leader for Hour Children's Prevention of Domestic Violence advocacy efforts, and participated in committees to advocate for women in prison.

L. was hired by Hour Children to work in one of the organization's thrift shops and has since been promoted to a supervisory position at another store in 2013.

YWCA of Queens was founded in 1978 to provide community-based programs for women of all ages in Flushing, Queens. The Women to Work program assists women in securing home health aide licensure and job placement. Many participants are native Korean or Mandarin speakers and are well-suited to working with elderly Asian residents in Queens. The high success of client-participant matches has resulted in a high demand from women who are eager for employment and have faced language and/or cultural barriers to workforce entry. As home health aides, their ability to speak a language other than English is seen as a true asset, rather than an impediment.



2012 Successes....

- **81 women obtained their licenses as home health aides and all subsequently obtained employment.**
- In a borough where the majority (54%) speak a language other than English at home, **all 39 women who enrolled in English as a Second Language classes graduated.**

“By providing women educational opportunities leading to employment, the (home health aide) program has helped them achieve a new level of independence, greater opportunities, and the ability and emotional fulfillment of being able to raise healthy families with hope for a brighter future.” (Grantee Quote)

Voces Latinas was founded in 2003 by Latina social workers to reduce the rate of HIV transmission among immigrant Latinas. The organization provides education and leadership training to enable women to make healthier decisions for themselves and their families. Voces Latinas connects immigrant Latinas with culturally and linguistically sensitive resources through peer-led grassroots outreach, educational workshops, and case management services. The organization conducts extensive training for peer health educators who go on to reach people who might not have been open to engaging in more traditional services.

2012 Successes....

- 92 women received intensive case management.
- 169 women were educated about healthy relationships.
- 120 women were educated about mental health issues.



Lexington Vocational Services (LVS) is the largest job placement and support services agency and the only publically supported vocational services agency in New York State that serves an exclusively deaf population. Programs include a School-to-Work transition program for graduating high school seniors, an American Sign Language (ASL) Institute, and employment services for adults. NYWF funding supports comprehensive job support services to disadvantaged deaf women to help clients overcome communication obstacles faced in every stage of the employment process. Program components include pre-employment services, individualized job searches, integrated career advancement services, and an array of support services. LVS reports that an increasing number of participants are immigrants. LVS staff is learning about the types of discrimination that women have faced in their home countries and tailoring their services to help program participants acculturate to the American workforce.

2012 Successes....

- 12 previously unemployed women obtained full-time jobs (46% of women who applied).
- 41 women completed financial literacy classes (100% of those who enrolled).
- 18 women received driver's licenses, and 11 were ready to take road tests.

Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice

is a women-led organization that was founded in 2005 by four young women of South Asian descent. The organization promotes human rights and social justice in Nepali communities by facilitating access to information and resources on immigration, health, workers' rights, and women's rights. The organization serves roughly 430 women annually, most of whom are service industry workers (e.g. domestic workers, nail salon staff, and beauty parlor workers) who speak little English and are marginalized within their communities and the larger society because of traditional gender roles and language barriers. NYWF funding supports the Nari Shakti program that seeks to end the labor exploitation of immigrant Nepali-speaking women workers through direct service, advocacy, and leadership development. English language classes are at the core of the Nari Shakti program and serve as a social forum for members.

“Trust is important to gain, especially among an immigrant population that is very distrusting of the systems and has been isolated for a long time.” (Grantee Quote)

2012 Successes....

- **184 women completed English as a Second Language coursework.**
- 70 women were involved in community advocacy efforts.
- 30 women received legal assistance in the area of credit repair/wage theft.

Participant Story.....

Since 2004, M. and her family had been unsuccessful in obtaining employment due to language barriers after emigrating from Colombia.

M. began intensive pre-employment sessions and enrolled in Lexington's ASL Institute for free ASL classes. She learned quickly and attended a range of workshops and other local deaf social groups to master ASL skills.

M. was soon placed in an internship at the Lex Voc Café. She quickly excelled and LVS was able to secure job placement before her six-month internship concluded. Today, M. works at Costco and says she is happier than ever due to her new found independence.

M. attends evening networking groups so that she can share her success story and helpful advice with new participants.



Participant Story.....

Early in 2012, Adhikaar had a major victory for one of their youngest member leaders, 23-year old S., and for domestic workers everywhere. S. was 17 years old in 2006 when her employers brought her to New York from India with the promise of paying 5,000 Indian rupees (approx. \$100) per month to do light cooking and a few chores. Instead, she regularly worked 16 hours each day, and worked longer when there were parties. At the end of her long day's work, she had to sleep on the living room floor, even though there were empty bedrooms in the apartment. For more than three years of work, S. received only a one-time payment of 5,500 rupees (less than \$120) and small tips from the employers' guests during parties. The employers confiscated her passport and told her that if she tried to go anywhere by herself, the police would beat her, rape her, and send her back to India. In 2009, S. finally gained courage to leave, and eventually came to Adhikaar. With support from Adhikaar, S. was connected with legal assistance and also slowly put her life back together. In March 2012, a judge determined that S. is owed almost \$1.5 million as compensation for the "barbaric treatment" and "emotional distress." Unfortunately, S. has not yet received the money; however, she has remained very strong and positive throughout the process, and wants to go to school and become a human rights activist so that no one else has to suffer like she did.



Challenges Addressing the Needs of Women and Girls

Grantee partners confront a range of organizational, societal, and political barriers. The economic downturn has presented major concerns for many grantee partners. Higher unemployment rates among all groups increase the competition and barriers to employment among vulnerable populations that already experience greater hurdles due to education, economic, and societal factors. **Grantee partners focus resources on ensuring that already disadvantaged participants have stronger skills as they conduct job searches and embark on new careers.**

The poor economic conditions also place strains on grantee organizations. Several partners report that staff members are stretched thin as they work long hours to accommodate participants' schedules and take on multiple, diverse roles within their organizations. Other grantee partners report the need for better internal systems, such as software to effectively track their work with clients, but few financial resources to make desired changes.

Several grantees mentioned the damaging role that stereotypes can play as they try to help women from diverse backgrounds secure employment. Each organization has developed program models that directly address this issue: from the YWCA that matches newly-licensed home health aides with senior citizens that share their linguistic and cultural background, to Hour Children that actively cultivates prospective employers for previously incarcerated women and pays the initial few weeks of salary to be sure the employer is satisfied with the placement.

Conclusion

In communities throughout Queens, women and families are living in poverty and face multiple obstacles to steady and sustainable employment that pays a living wage. **The difficulties may be evident, but so too are many of the solutions.** The community groups that NYWF supports connect participants with vital opportunities and help build stronger neighborhoods. NYWF supports organizations with innovative and unique approaches that can meet the needs of marginalized women and their families in the neighborhoods where they live.

NYWF seeks to create transforming opportunities that help girls and women live safe, healthy, productive lives. The Foundation is deeply proud of the accomplishments of grantee partners serving communities in Queens. The creative efforts of the partners assist women and girls in overcoming challenges, realizing their potential, and in turn, investing in their home communities. The New York Women's Foundation looks forward to continuing and strengthening our partnerships in Queens, progressing toward the goal of a more just, equitable, and safe City for women and their families.

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